



Biden, Macron vow unity against Russia, discuss trade row



President Joe Biden and French President Emmanuel Macron stand on the stage during a State Arrival Ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, Thursday, Dec. 1, 2022. Associated Press

By COLLEEN LONG, SYLVIE CORBET and AAMER MADHANI
Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Presidents Joe Biden and Emmanuel Macron vowed to maintain a united front against Russia on Thursday amid growing worries about waning support for Ukraine's war effort in the U.S. and Europe. Biden also signaled he might be willing to tweak aspects of his signature climate legislation that have raised concerns with France and other European allies.

Biden was honoring Macron with a grand state dinner Thursday evening — the first of the U.S. president's COVID-19 shadowed presidency for a foreign leader. But following up on Biden's upbeat comments might not go as smoothly as that fancy affair. Republicans who are about to take control of the House have shown less willingness than Biden to spend billions on Ukraine,

and Democratic lawmakers said Thursday they were not about to jump back into the climate legislation.

In fact, for all the positive statements, Macron's visit to Washington has been tempered by his criticism of Biden's Inflation Reduction Act and the challenges both leaders face amid the mounting costs of keeping military and economic aid flowing to Kyiv with no end in sight for the Russian invasion.

Despite the differences, Biden and Macron sought to underscore that the U.S.-France alliance remains solid and that the West must hold steadfast against Russian President Vladimir Putin's war in Ukraine. "Today, we reaffirm that, as I said, we're going to stand together against this brutality," Biden said.

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Aruba waiting on Venezuelan authorities for a meeting regarding reopening of border



Ashley Urbaneja "My dream is to represent Aruba in rhythmic gymnastics at the Olympics"



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Biden, Macron vow unity against Russia, discuss trade row



President Joe Biden and first lady Jill Biden with French President Emmanuel Macron and his wife Brigitte Macron wave from the Blue Room Balcony during a State Arrival Ceremony on the South Lawn of the White House in Washington, Thursday, Dec. 1, 2022. Associated Press

Continued from Front

“Putin thinks that he can crush the will of all those who oppose his imperial ambitions by attacking civilian infrastructure in Ukraine, choking off energy to Europe to drive up prices, exacerbating the food crisis. That’s hurting very vulnerable people not just in Ukraine but around the world and he’s not going to succeed.”

Both leaders at an outdoor welcoming ceremony paid tribute to their countries’ long alliance. But they acknowledged difficult moments lay ahead as Western unity shows some wear nine months into the war in Ukraine.

In Washington, Republicans are set to take control of the House, where GOP leader Kevin McCarthy has said his party’s lawmakers will not write a “blank check” for Ukraine. Across the Atlantic, Macron’s efforts to keep Europe united will be tested by the mounting costs of supporting Ukraine in the war and as Europe battles rising energy prices that threaten to derail the post-pandemic economic recovery.

Macron stressed that the issue has ramifications far

beyond Ukraine’s borders. “What is at stake in Ukraine is not just very far from here, in a small country somewhere in Europe,” he declared. “But it’s about our values. And about our principles.” “Our two nations are sisters in the fight for freedom,” he said.

Biden indicated he would be willing to talk with Putin if the Russian leader demonstrated that he seriously wanted to end the invasion. But the U.S. president, as always, conditioned such talks on support by NATO allies.

“I’m prepared to speak with Mr. Putin if in fact there is an interest in him deciding that he’s looking for a way to end the war,” Biden said. “He hasn’t done that yet.”

In addition to their talk of Ukraine — what White House officials said was at the top of the agenda — the two leaders discussed Macron’s and other leaders’ concerns about the recently enacted clean energy law.

Macron has made clear that he and other European leaders are opposed to incentives in the Inflation Reduction Act that favor American-made climate technology, includ-

ing electric vehicles. Biden acknowledged “glitches” in the legislation but said “there’s tweaks we can make” to satisfy allies.

“The United States makes no apology. And I make no apologies since I wrote it for the legislation we’re talking about,” Biden added about the legislation.

However, Macron said that while the Biden administration’s efforts to curb climate change should be applauded, the subsidies would be an enormous setback for European companies. “We want to succeed together, not one against the other,” Macron added. He said the U.S. and France would “resynchronize” their clean energy efforts to ensure there’s no “domino effect” that undermines clean energy projects in Europe.

On Capitol Hill, despite Biden’s talk of possible changes in the law, Senate Finance Committee Chairman Ron Wyden, one of the bill’s main architects, said, “Congress passed a law to rev up the American electric automobile industry, create good-paying American jobs and tackle climate change at the same time. I have no intention of reopening it.”

The European Union has also expressed concern that tax credits in the law would discriminate against European producers and break World Trade Organization rules.

The leaders, with aides, met for about three hours after taking part in a formal ceremony with hundreds of people gathered on the South Lawn on a sunny, chilly morning. There was a 21-gun salute and review of troops, and ushers distributed small French and American flags to the guests.

Both Biden and Macron in their public comments sought to keep the focus on the situation in Ukraine. The state visit should provide a boost to Macron diplomatically that he can leverage back in Europe. His outspoken comments help him demonstrate that he’s defending French workers, even as he maintains a close relationship with Biden. The moment also helps Macron burnish his image as the European Union’s most visible and vocal leader, at a time when Europe is increasingly concerned that its economy will be indelibly weakened by the Ukraine war and resulting energy and inflation crises. To that end, Biden

praised Macron as “not just the leader of France” and for being “very outspoken and very very commanding in Europe.” In his public comments, Macron repeatedly referred to the U.S. president as “dear Joe.” Still, at moments, Macron’s rhetoric has rankled U.S. and Ukrainian officials, with calls for Ukraine and Russia to meet at the negotiating table. White House officials have publicly maintained that it is solely up to Ukraine’s leadership to decide when it’s appropriate to engage the Russians and have stressed the war could end immediately if Putin ended his invasion.

Macron also raised eyebrows earlier this month in a speech at a summit in Bangkok when he referred to the U.S. and China as “two big elephants” that are on the cusp of creating “a big problem for the rest of the jungle.” His visit to Washington came as both the U.S. and France are keeping their eyes on China after protests have broken out in several mainland cities and Hong Kong over Beijing’s “zero COVID” strategy.

The state visit marked a return of a White House tradition of honoring close foreign allies that dates back to Ulysses S. Grant’s presidency.

Macron and his wife, Brigitte, came to the U.S. bearing gifts carefully tailored to their American hosts, including a vinyl record and CD of the original soundtrack from the 1966 film “Un Homme et une Femme,” which the Bidens went to see on their first date, according to the palace.

Among the gifts Biden and first lady Jill Biden presented the Macrons was a mirror framed by fallen wood from the White House grounds and made by an American furniture maker. Vice President Kamala Harris hosted Macron for a lunch at the State Department before the evening state dinner in an enormous tented pavilion constructed on the White House South Lawn. □

House panel says lax screening helped facilitate PPP fraud

By FATIMA HUSSEIN

Associated Press

WASHINGTON (AP) — Financial technology firms abdicated their responsibility to screen out fraud in applications for a federal program designed to help small businesses stay open and keep workers employed during the pandemic, a report by a House investigations panel said Thursday.

The House Select Subcommittee on the Coronavirus Crisis launched its investigation of the firms in May 2021 after public reports that the firms were linked to disproportionate numbers of fraudulent loans issued under the Paycheck Protection Program.

Former President Donald Trump rolled out the Paycheck Protection Program to help small businesses stay open and keep their workers employed. President Joe Biden maintained the program and directed money to more low-income and minority-owned companies. All told, \$800 billion was spent on the program. The financial technology firms reviewed PPP applications for lenders, which would ultimately distribute PPP money to businesses.

The report said two startups, Blueacorn PPP and Womply Inc. — which re-



House Majority Whip James Clyburn, D-S.C., leaves the chamber at the Capitol in Washington, Nov. 17, 2022.

viewed one in every three funded PPP loans in 2021 — were connected to significant percentages of PPP loan applications with indicators of fraud.

It said the firms used questionable screening procedures and business practices in reviewing the loans, leading to "the needless loss of taxpayer dollars," the report said. The firms "took billions in fees from taxpayers while becoming easy targets for those who sought to defraud the PPP." Neither firm responded immediately to a request for comment.

The report said Womply's

fraud prevention practices were so lax that lenders describe its systems as "put together with duct tape and gum." It said Womply's software became a preferred product for criminal enterprises seeking to defraud the government of PPP loans. The firm also received over \$5 million in PPP loans for itself, which the Small Business Administration later determined it was ineligible to receive. Womply said in a statement sent to the committee in January that the firm's role in the screening process was limited. "Womply did not approve PPP

loan applications, issue PPP loans, or otherwise serve as a lender in the PPP. Womply helped connect borrowers with PPP lenders, which were responsible for reviewing, approving, submitting, funding, and servicing the PPP applications and loans," the company's lawyers wrote.

Womply referred 128,813 PPP applicants to lenders in 2020, and 2,584,420 applicants to lenders in 2021. "We must learn from this inexcusable misconduct to erect guardrails that will help ensure that federal programs — including emergency assistance pro-

grams in future crises — are administered more effectively, efficiently, and equitably while keeping waste, fraud, and abuse to an absolute minimum," said Rep. Jim Clyburn, D-S.C., who chairs the coronavirus crisis subcommittee.

Clyburn said the committee's findings were sent to the Justice Department and the Small Business Administration.

In March, the Government Accountability Office reported that while agencies were able to distribute COVID-19 relief funds quickly, "the tradeoff was that they did not have systems in place to prevent and identify payment errors and fraud" due in part to "financial management weaknesses."

Billions have been fraudulently claimed through various pandemic relief programs — including Paycheck Protection Program loans, unemployment insurance and others that were rolled out in the midst of the worldwide pandemic that shut down global economies for months.

The U.S. Secret Service in August said it has recovered \$286 million in fraudulently obtained pandemic loans and returned the money to the Small Business Administration. □

New U.S. sanctions against North Koreans over missile program

WASHINGTON (AP) — The Biden administration on Thursday imposed sanctions on three members of North Korea's ruling party's central committee for their involvement in the country's ballistic missile program.

The Treasury Department announced it was targeting the director and vice director of the Workers Party of Korea, Jon Il Ho and Yu Jin, respectively, along with another central committee member, Kim Su Gil, with asset freezes and bans on Americans conducting any type of business with them. The sanctions came as North Korea has ramped up its ballistic missile testing

to a record pace this year with more than 60 launches, dialing up pressure on Washington and Seoul.

The three officials "played major roles" in North Korea's development of weapons in violation of U.N. resolutions, the Treasury Department said in a statement, and "have personally attended numerous ballistic missile launches since at least 2017."

The trio were penalized by the European Union in April and had been previously covered under existing U.S. sanctions against the North's ruling party.

The dozens of tests have included multiple launches

of ICBMs with a potential range to reach the U.S. mainland and an intermediate-range missile flown over Japan.

North Korea has also conducted a barrage of short-range launches it described as simulated nuclear attacks on South Korean and U.S. targets as it angrily reacted to the expansion of the allies' combined military exercises, which North Korea insists are rehearsals for a potential invasion.

North Korea has punctuated the tests with threats of nuclear conflict with Washington and Seoul that communicated an escalatory nuclear doctrine.



This photo provided on Nov. 19, 2022, by the North Korean government shows what it says is a Hwasong-17 intercontinental ballistic missile before its test firing at Pyongyang International Airport in Pyongyang, North Korea, Friday, Nov. 18, 2022.

Associated Press

The North's rubber-stamp parliament in September passed a law that authorized preemptive nuclear attacks in a broad range

of scenarios, including non-war situations, where the country may perceive its leadership as under threat. □

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By **FATIMA HUSSEIN**

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Associated Press

Rat Attack: NYC seeks hands-on leader in anti-rodent fight

NEW YORK (AP) — Hate rats? Are you a “somewhat bloodthirsty” New Yorker with excellent communication skills and “a general aura of badassery”? Then you might have what it takes to be the city’s new rat czar.

Mayor Eric Adams’ administration posted a job listing this week seeking someone to lead the city’s long-running battle against rats. The official job title is “director of rodent mitigation,” although it was promptly dubbed the rat czar. Salary range is \$120,000 to \$170,000.

“The ideal candidate is highly motivated and somewhat bloodthirsty, determined to look at all solutions from various angles, including improving opera-

tional efficiency, data collection, technology innovation, trash management, and wholesale slaughter,” reads that ad.

The posting is whimsical, but the job is daunting. New York City leaders have been trying to control the rodent population for generations, with mixed results. Sightings of rats in parks, sidewalks and other places in the city have recently increased.

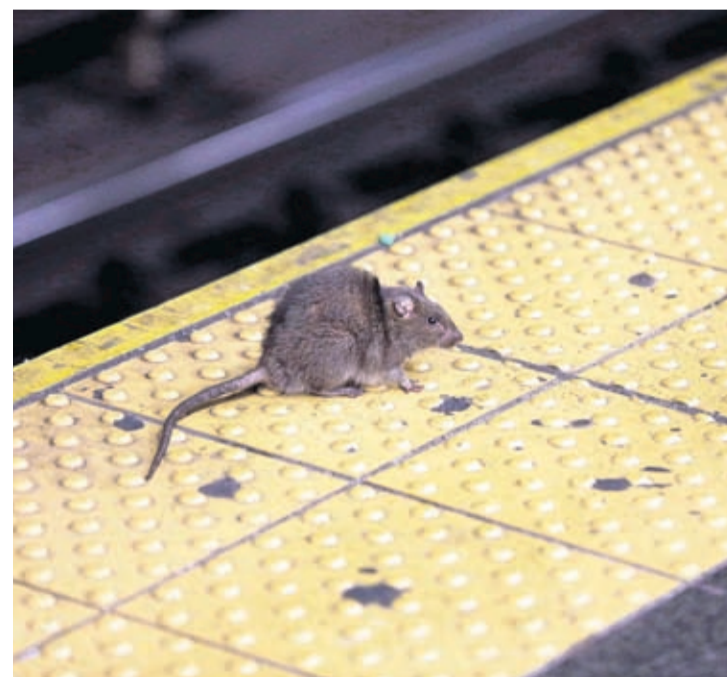
City rats have survived a multimillion-dollar effort under former Mayor Bill de Blasio that focused on more trash pickups and better housing inspections in targeted neighborhoods. The city also launched a program to use dry ice to suffocate rats in their hiding spots.

Adams, when he was borough president of Brooklyn, once demonstrated a trap that used a bucket filled with a toxic soup to drown rats lured by the scent of food.

Now, the Adams’ administration is looking for a top rat bureaucrat to become the public face of the city’s eradication and education efforts.

“Cunning, voracious, and prolific, New York City’s rats are legendary for their survival skills, but they don’t run this city – we do,” claimed the posting.

Applicants are expected to have a crafty sense of humor and “to lead from the front, using hands-on techniques to exterminate rodents with authority and efficiency.” □



A rat crosses a Times Square subway platform in New York on Jan. 27, 2015. New York City Mayor Eric Adams’ administration posted a job listing this week seeking someone to lead the city’s long-running battle against rats.

Associated Press

Spain: numerous devices found after Ukrainian Embassy blast

By CIARÁN GILES
Associated Press

MADRID (AP) — Police in Spain detonated a suspicious parcel discovered at the U.S. Embassy in Madrid, Spanish officials said Thursday, a day after a similar package sent to the Ukrainian Embassy ignited upon opening and injured an employee.

"We can confirm a suspicious package was received at the U.S. Embassy in Madrid, and are aware of reports of other packages sent to other locations throughout Spain," the American embassy said in a response to an Associated Press inquiry.

"We are grateful to Spanish law enforcement for their assistance with this matter," it added.

Spain's police said the detonated parcel "contained substances similar to those used in pyrotechnics."

The action followed police reporting that multiple explosive parcels were sent in Spain over the past two days. Police said they were delivered to Spain's Defense Ministry, a European Union satellite center located at the Torrejón de Ardoz air base outside Madrid and to an arms factory in northeastern Spain that makes grenades sent to



Police officers stand guard as other officers in yellow vests walk back at the cordoned off area next to the Ukrainian embassy in Madrid, Spain, Wednesday, Nov. 30, 2022.

Associated Press

Ukraine.

Authorities said a bomb squad also destroyed an explosive device that was dispatched by regular post to Spanish Prime Minister Pedro Sánchez on Nov. 24. Spain's interior ministry, which is charge of the country's police forces, said that the envelope intercepted at the American embassy's security screening point was "of similar characteristics as the previous ones." It was then detonated by authorities after a wide

area was cordoned off by Spanish police around the embassy in the center of Spain's capital.

Spanish authorities have yet to determine who was responsible for the letters or link them to the war in Ukraine. The Russian Embassy in Madrid on Thursday condemned the letter bombs, saying in a tweet that "any threat or terrorist attack, especially those directed at diplomatic missions, are totally condemnable." The package

sent to the Ukrainian Embassy was addressed to the country's ambassador to Spain, Serhii Pohoreltsev. The employee handling it was slightly injured when it burst into flames.

In an interview Wednesday following the blast, ambassador Pohoreltsev told European Pravda, a news website linked to the Ukrainska Pravda newspaper, that the explosion could have been more serious but for the professional behavior of the injured employee. He

said the parcel looked suspicious to the secretary of the ambassador because there was no return address and it did not look like a typical diplomatic post.

"The package contained a box, which caused suspicion to the commandant and he decided to take it outside with no one in the vicinity and open it. After opening the box and hearing a click that followed, he tossed it and then heard the explosion," said the ambassador.

The embassy employee was treated for light wounds on his hand and later returned to work.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba ordered stepped-up security at all of Ukraine's foreign embassies abroad and asked his Spanish counterpart for a fast investigation.

Two further Ukrainian embassies received threatening letters on Wednesday, Kuleba said on the sidelines of a high-level security meeting in Lodz, Poland, on Thursday. Kuleba added, without giving details, that "other disturbing events took place" on Wednesday, involving "the sending of very concrete threats to Ukrainian embassies." He declined to specify the embassies in question. □

Germany, Norway urge NATO to protect undersea infrastructure

BERLIN (AP) — NATO's secretary-general on Thursday welcomed a recommendation by Germany and Norway for the military alliance to set up a center tasked with protecting undersea infrastructure such as gas pipelines and telecommunication cables.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said after talks with his Norwegian counterpart on Wednesday that they would ask NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg to set up such a center.

He pointed to the trans-Atlantic alliance's "proven coordination capabilities, its maritime presence and its expertise."

A center coordinating pro-

tection efforts would also be "a clear signal (that) we take the protection of our critical infrastructure very seriously, and no one should believe that attacks would remain without consequences."

Scholz returned to the issue at a news conference with Stoltenberg on Thursday. He said explosions in September that damaged the Nord Stream 1 and 2 pipelines built to transport Russian gas to Germany under the Baltic Sea, which investigators say were an act of sabotage, "showed that we must completely re-evaluate the risks for our energy infrastructure." That, he said, is particularly true in the North Sea.

Stoltenberg called undersea pipelines and telecommunications cables "arteries for our economies." He said that NATO has doubled the number of ships patrolling the North and Baltic Seas following the Nord Stream explosions and stepped up intelligence-sharing, "but we need to do more to help protect this vital infrastructure."

He welcomed the German-Norwegian initiative for a "NATO undersea infrastructure center," which he said would "provide allies with better situation awareness, map our vulnerabilities" and help deter any attacks against allies' undersea infrastructure. □



NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg delivers a statement during a visit of the 'Berlin Wall Museum' at the former checkpoint 'Charlie' in Berlin, Germany, Thursday, Dec. 1, 2022.

Associated Press

World court: scant disagreement in Chile, Bolivia water row

MOLLY QUELL

Associated Press

THE HAGUE (AP) — The International Court of Justice on Thursday found little to rule on in a long-running dispute over a small river which flows from Bolivia to Chile as the Latin American neighbors had mostly resolved their conflict during the proceedings.

The United Nations' highest court spent most of the hour-long hearing explaining that the two countries' legal claims over the Silala River - a short waterway in the Atacama Desert - were "without objection" as both countries have now agreed on how the water should be managed.

"It is an international watercourse, as both parties now agree," said an American judge Joan E. Donoghue, who serves as the court's president. Bolivia had initially rejected this designation since international law requires international water resources to be managed cooperatively.

Chile brought the claim to the Hague-based court in 2016, arguing that Bolivia was violating international water laws by blocking the flow of the river. During hearings in April, Bolivia



Chile's vice-minister for foreign affairs Ximean Fuentes, left, and Bolivian Foreign Minister, Rogelio Mayta, right, talk prior to the reading of the verdict at the World Court in The Hague, Netherlands, Thursday, Dec. 1, 2022, where the UN's top court ruled on a dispute about a river that crosses Chile's and Bolivia's border, in a case seen as important jurisprudence at a time when fresh water is becoming an increasingly coveted world resource.

claimed the waterway isn't a river at all, but rather a series of underground springs forced above ground by Chilean construction.

A 1997 U.N. convention on water rights requires countries whose borders intersect major waterways to share the natural resource equally.

In the past six years of legal

proceedings in the case, the two countries significantly narrowed the scope of their disagreement through diplomatic efforts, eventually agreeing on all but several minor technical points.

Chile demanded that Bolivia notify it before carrying out certain activities on the waterway, but the court re-

jected this request as having no basis in international law. Chile said Thursday's ruling was a victory.

"The court is now only restating the fact that Bolivia has accepted all that Chile came for," Ximena Fuentes, Chile's vice-minister for foreign affairs, told reporters following the hearing.

Bolivia's legal team left the

court without commenting the ruling.

"It is recognized that Chile's historical use and its current use of the waters of the Silala River is in accordance with the equitable and reasonable use established by international law," said Chilean President Gabriel Boric after the ruling.

"Our country can rest easy with this court ruling," he said. "We have obtained the legal certainty that we were looking for and the disputed issues have been definitively resolved."

Bolivian President Luis Arce said in a Twitter post that "Bolivia has resolved a controversy with a brother nation."

The ruling of the International Court of Justice "ratifies our rights over the waters of Silala and our sovereignty over the dismantling of the artificial canals," he wrote.

Bolivian Foreign Minister Rogelio Mayta said "the ruling gives us important certainties." The court "made it clear that Bolivia has the right to the channeling" that was done in "its territory" to improve the water flow and to "recover wetlands that have been deteriorated" by these works, Mayta said. □

Associated Press

Israel's Netanyahu puts hardliner in charge of settlements

By ELEANOR H. REICH

Associated Press

JERUSALEM (AP) — Israel's designated prime minister

Benjamin Netanyahu on Thursday announced a coalition deal that will give a hardline, pro-settler party

control over a number of key government ministries and a senior role in overseeing the construction of Jewish settlements in the occupied West Bank.

The agreement with the Religious Zionism party marked an important breakthrough for Netanyahu as he tries to cobble together a government following Nov. 1 elections. But it also could set the stage for conflict with key allies, first and foremost the United States.

Netanyahu's Likud Party said that Religious Zionism would share control over the Finance Ministry, run the government ministry in charge of immigration and head a new ministry for "national missions."

It said a party member

would also hold a special ministerial level post in the Defense Ministry in charge of settlement construction in the occupied West Bank, in coordination with Netanyahu.

"This is a significant additional step that nears us toward the formation of a right-wing, national government," Netanyahu said. The deal also gives Religious Zionism control of a parliamentary committee expected to approve sweeping reforms in the country's legal system. These are expected to include changes that could freeze or dismiss criminal charges against Netanyahu.

Bezalel Smotrich, chairman of the Religious Zionism party, called the deal a "his-

toric step."

He said the emerging government would "restore security and governance, promote historic reform in the legal system, regulate and develop the settlement enterprise, strengthen Jewish identity in the spirit of religious Zionism and proudly wave the flag of Zionism."

Smotrich is a leader of the West Bank settlement movement and is seeking a massive increase in construction of Jewish housing in occupied territories claimed by the Palestinians for their future state. The international community, including the U.S., overwhelmingly considers settlement construction illegal or illegitimate. □



Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid, center, Likud Party leader Benjamin Netanyahu, left, far-right Israeli lawmaker Bezalel Smotrich and leaders of all Israel's political parties pose for a group photo after the swearing-in ceremony for Israeli lawmakers at the Knesset, Israel's parliament, in Jerusalem, Tuesday, Nov. 15, 2022.

Associated Press

Aruba waiting on Venezuelan authorities for a meeting regarding reopening of border

ORANJESTAD – The reopening of the border between Aruba and Venezuela stays in the local news because during the last few months, negotiations between both countries are not progressing. However, prime minister of Aruba, Mrs. Evelyn Wever-Croes told our reporter that the Aruban government is still waiting.

Seeing as the prime minister is currently on a working trip to the Netherlands, she said that they are meet-

ing with different officials and organizations in The Hague. As Foreign Relations for Aruba are a matter of the Kingdom of the Netherlands handled from The Hague, our reporter asked if she had an update regarding the reopening of the border with the neighboring country. The prime minister said: "The topic of Venezuela keeps progressing. We have invited Venezuela for a meeting to discuss the reopening of the border. We invited them to

meet in Curaçao, but they haven't given a reply yet." The last update on this topic came on the 3rd of October, when the prime minister explained: "Aruba wants to reopen the border with Venezuela, but this needs to happen under very well-defined conditions." During an interview with the local press, the prime minister pointed out that in 2018, Venezuelan president Mr. Nicolas Maduro closed the border between his country and Aruba and Curaçao, accusing Aruba of stealing copper from Venezuela. At that time, the border was closed for approximately five months, until the governments of Aruba and of Venezuela reached concrete agreements under which conditions the border could be reopened. "Aruba doesn't steal copper from anyone, and we do not accept that Aruba will get a bad reputation



because of this", the prime minister said.

Between May and June of that year, the border was reopened in good agreement between Aruba and Venezuela, but then, in January 2019 once again president Maduro closed the border with the ABC islands – Aruba, Curaçao and Bonaire – because Curaçao was acting as a humanitarian hub for help for Venezuela, and he considered this a reason to close the border with the Dutch islands. "At that time, it was a hard hit, but we have strength in resilience and we found other alternatives", Wever-Croes said.

In May 2019 the decision was made to reopen the border with Aruba, not with

Curaçao or Bonaire as the prime minister pointed out, but Aruba was not ready to accept this as there were no agreements nor conditions under which to agree to open the border. From that moment until now, Venezuelan authorities had not sat down at the negotiation table to reopen the border under safe and responsible conditions. For this reason, Aruba has invited Venezuelan authorities once again to sit at the negotiation table in Curaçao, to reach concrete agreements to reopen the border responsibly. This is because there are mixed feelings both in people who live in Aruba and want to travel to Venezuela, as well as business owners who want to import products at a more affordable price. □



International Day of Persons with Disabilities celebrated with SVGA

ORANJESTAD – Wednesday morning in a festive atmosphere at the China Club, the Foundation for Mental Disabilities of Aruba (Stichting voor Verstandelijk Gehandicapten Aruba, SVGA) celebrated the International Day of Persons with Disabilities together with minister of Education and Sport, Mr. Endy Croes.

This year's theme was Together in the World. Clients of Cas Blenchi, Pasadia Bibito Pin, Centro Man na Obra, Scol Dun'un Man,

Pasadia Briyo di Solo and Cas Sjabururi prepared a beautiful show where each represented a country through a show of dance and music.

During the pleasant morning, substitute director of SVGA, Mrs. Elvira Arias-Tromp gave a speech, as did the minister of Education and Sport. The minister made an emphasis on inclusion, giving opportunities to each person with disabilities to develop themselves and find their own place in our community.



Mr. Croes thanked the commission that organized the event for the clients, and emphasized that SVGA can count on the support of the Wever-Croes Cabinet and particularly his ministries.

Finalizing, Croes congratulated the clients, who punt on an excellent performance, and expressed his thankfulness to all teachers and leaders working with love and passion. "Let us celebrate the International Day for Persons with Disabilities and let us give support, love

and appreciation to our people with disabilities." □



Paseo Herencia is always fun and exciting to visit



NOORD— Paseo Herencia offers a variety of shopping, dining and entertainment options in an outdoor center located in the heart of Palm Beach – walking distance from the high-rise hotels.

Shopping

The Paseo Herencia stores offer a great collection in beach wear, clothing, perfume, shoes, jewelry, souvenirs and much more. Pamper yourself by visiting Maggy's and enjoy their salon services and shop for your favorite beauty products. Aruba Aloe has that perfect gift to bring back home, all made with natural ingredients. Other brand favorites are Tommy Hilfiger, Calvin Klein, Aldo, Carmen Steffens,

Nike store, Pandora and many more.

Restaurants

Start with a breakfast meal at Paseo Herencia offering unique breakfast options such as Drunk's Denial with their Make it Your Own Crêpe Bar offering sweet and savory crêpe flavors and the option to booze it up with their Mimosa crêpe (mandarin soaked in champagne), Pina Colada (pineapples in coconut rum), Bourbon Apple, Brandy Apricot, Whiskey Pear and more. Location can be found by following the bakery smell upon arrival. Another option is Seabarita offering you delicious breakfast options ranging from Huevos Rancheros to

empanadas surrounded by a cozy picnic setting with street-side view. Go Argentinian style at Che Bar and try their delicious omelet with chorizo/ham, mozzarella, onions, peppers, and tomatoes served with skillet potatoes and toast. Looking for something for the whole family? Visit TGI Fridays and choose between waffle, omelets, breakfast sandwiches and tacos starting at \$8. These restaurants are also open for lunch & dinner offering you a variety of cuisine choices. If you're looking for more unique concepts, join us for dinner at Xixon Restaurant greatly known in Miami for their Spanish inspired dishes with top notch flavors and the largest wine variety or visit The Lazy Turtle and try their ex-

otic African dish "Kuvuta Kuku" accompanied by their tasty lazy cocktails. Coming for drinks? Sip and have a good time at the Bulldog Aruba located in the center of the Plaza. Open till late.

VIP Cinema

Visit the one-of-a-kind Caribbean Cinemas VIP on the second floor of Paseo Herencia and enjoy your favorite movies in the most comfortable reclining seats with high quality screens with the latest projection and 7.1 Dolby surround sound and not to forget their delicious buttery bag of popcorn.

Entertainment

Catch live shows from Monday to Thursday and Sunday at 8pm on the Paseo center stage and the nightly water shows at 7:30pm, 8:30pm and 9:30pm. Looking for some adrenaline? Visit the Airsoft experience located behind The Lazy Turtle. Snap Instagramable pictures at the Angel Wings located between Pandora and Free Spirit or the Flying mosaic hearts located behind King Churros.

Parking up to two hours is free when shopping, dining or catching a movie at Paseo Herencia. Just present your purchase receipt at our parking cashier.



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Further Development Information Organizations Carib (DIOC) congress held by the Board of Chief of Police

ORANJESTAD – On November 28, 2022, the DIOC Congress held by the Board of Chief of Police started.

In this Congress, all stakeholders follow the intelligence training course. They also seize the opportunity to come to a consensus on how to work better and closer together and share duties and consultation structures.

The Minister of Justice and Social Affairs, Rocco Tjon, is satisfied to attend the Congress about the investments required in the information departments in the Caribbean. One of the most significant issues in

the Minister of Justice and Social Affairs Policy plan is the fight against crime by investing more in the information departments. It is time to realize that an information department is essential to fight crime efficiently and effectively and not a luxury.

For this reason, information management and everything information related is a priority on the strategic agenda of the Minister of Justice.

According to Minister Tjon, he is thrilled to see how the Board of Police Chiefs organized this Congress. The Judicial departments of the

Dutch Kingdom and other entities came together to seek the most efficient way to share information and come to agreements. It is important not only due to local and international developments but also due to the technical and judicial challenges. The Congress is for three days and includes a workshop about the latest developments in the intelligence and information world.

The Minister thanked the Board of Chief of Police and the entire team for realizing this encounter to fight against crime through intelligence and information. □



Visit to the Council of State

ORANJESTAD – On November 30, 2022, Prime Minister Evelyn Wever - Croes and the Finance Minister, Xiomara Maduro, visited the Council of State and met with the representative of Aruba in the Council of State, Mrs. Mildred Schwengle, and Mr. Richard van Zwol, member of the Council of State.



During this meeting, the Prime Minister and Finance Minister provided information about the steps Aruba is taking within the framework of financial recovery.

Aruba is currently in the recovery phase. Therefore the information needs to reach the Netherlands

about what Aruba is doing in this regard. During the meeting with Mrs. Schwengle, they discussed various topics regarding the aim of their visit to the Netherlands and shared financial information about Aruba.

They also met with Mr. Richard van Zwol, an acquaintance of Aruba and a member of the Council of State, on the financial situation of Aruba. He commented that Aruba is taking essential steps to recover financially. □



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Exploring the Mainstreet of San Nicolas

SAN NICOLAS— At Just 11 miles southeast from Oranjestad you will enter the city San Nicolas, also known as Sunrise City or Chocolate City. A city that is rich in authentic culture and island charm. San Nicolas is Aruba's second largest city and was once a bustling company town dominated by the oil industry since the early 1930's.

Over the course of four decades, its demographics had changed immensely due to a stream of Afro-Caribbean and South American workers who came to fill the jobs in the oil refinery between the 1920's until the 1960's. To this day traces of the multicultural influences in culinary offerings and customs, housing and population are clearly visible in San Nicolas - more than anywhere else on the island.

Flow of history

if you are looking for history San Nicolas has it. Here you will find three amazing museums, The Museum of Industry, the Community Museum and the Carnival Euphoria, all within walking distance from one another.

The Museum of Industry is situated in the Water Tower in San Nicolas and narrates Aruba's industrial history which began in the 19th century. Here you will learn about gold, aloe, phosphate, oil and the tourism industries which made San Nicolas once a bustling business center. Experience the touching stories of those who were part of this history.

Nicolaas Store built in 1940 and renovated in 2014 is the home of the Community Museum. The collection is remarkable and spans millennia. Ancient fossils stand next to tableaus of an authentically recreated colonial kitchen and bedroom and 19th-century barbershop, just to name a few of the items of old-time Aruba that has been preserved. A collection of artifacts and other objects of artistic, cultural, historical, or scientific importance can be found here for the purpose of education or enjoyment.

Carnival Euphoria is showcasing Aruba's Carnival. See how are Carnival has developed over the past 65 years.



The new San Nicolas

In the shadow of the refinery, an art capital is quietly beginning to grow. This is the new San Nicolas, a place that is starting to become a magnet for all that is young, cool and hip in Aruba. Indeed, San Nicolas has all of the ingredients of an emerging cultural hub — varied history, interesting architecture, and, perhaps most importantly, an urban layout that makes it walkable. As you walk around, the streets are silent but the walls are loud, filled with bright, colorful murals painted by a collection of artists from around the world. Thanks to the efforts of various art organizations in Aruba, such as Art Rules Aruba and Aruba Art Fair, San Nicolas has had quite the aesthetic makeover with regards to vibrant street art. Each year more and more stunning murals are replacing broken down buildings with colorful art pieces that keep brightening up SunriseCity.

Must See, Do, Buy & Eat

A little bit of everything can be found in the main street. Stores selling shoes, clothing, jewelry you name it. Arts & crafts by Cosecha store

& Creative Center, a design store in which you can immerse yourself in discovering genuine and locally made arts and crafts which reflect the diversification of the Aruban craft heritage and the artistic supply of artisans. Don't miss out on trying the exquisite food offered by the cafes and restaurants or just enjoy a peaceful walk admiring the murals, mosaic benches and all the history San Nicolas has to offer. □



Ashley Urbaneja: "My dream is to represent Aruba in rhythmic gymnastics at the Olympics"



ORANJESTAD – Ashley Urbaneja is an 11-year-old girl who stands out in the discipline of rhythmic gymnastics. During a special interview with our reporter, Ashley together with her mother, Mariana Urbaneja shared about her career in gymnastics, her achievements, and her dreams for the future.

Ashley began her career in rhythmic gymnastics when she was only three and a half years old. She was born in Maracay, Venezuela, and began her training at the Club Alfa under the direction of coach Orquidia Ramos.

Ashley's mother explains that through different evaluations and internal as well as state competitions, the coach noticed that Ashley has important qualities to succeed in this sport. After some years, when she was almost seven years old, Ashley together with her mother left their country and came to Aruba to reunite with Ashley's father, who was already living and working in Aruba.

"We are extremely thankful to the island for all the opportunities that we have received, especially for Ashley", Mrs. Urbaneja expressed. She said that after their arrival in Aruba right away they began researching for rhythmic gymnastics clubs in Aruba, and they found the club Avanse. Here, coach Adriana Sevilla carried out all the necessary evaluations, and Ashley showed her talent and qualities which she had learned during her training in Venezuela.

Ashley's first international competition representing Aruba was in June 2018, which took place in Costa Rica, where Ashley managed to win the first gold medal in rhythmic gymnastics for Aruba.

"This was a big incentive for Ashley as well as for the Aruban community because through the achievements of Aruba during this competition, the discipline of rhythmic gymnastics became better known and more popular", Urbaneja explained.

During the month of May in 2019, Ashley together with the Aruban rhythmic gymnastics delegation traveled to Miami for the international competition of Rhythmic Art, where once again Ashley stood out and brought several medals for Aruba. "Ashley won the gold medal in the freestyle category, silver medal in hoop, and bronze in all-around. She was the only athlete from Aruba who got on the podium, a big source of pride for us", Urbaneja said.

That same year, during the international competition Cup of Aruba, where more than eleven countries came to Aruba to compete, Ashley once again went on the podium by winning silver and a bronze medal for Aruba.

During the last competition that took place in Aruba, the International Cup Aruba, Ashley had an excellent performance once again representing Aruba. "I want to emphasize how proud we are as family, as fundamental pillars in her development and education. We are also extremely thankful to her coach Adriana Sevilla", Mariana Urbaneja said.

"I believe that her perseverance, responsibility, focus and love for gymnastics allowed [Ashley] to reach where she is now. She always says that her main wish is to become a professional gymnast, and these qualities continue help-

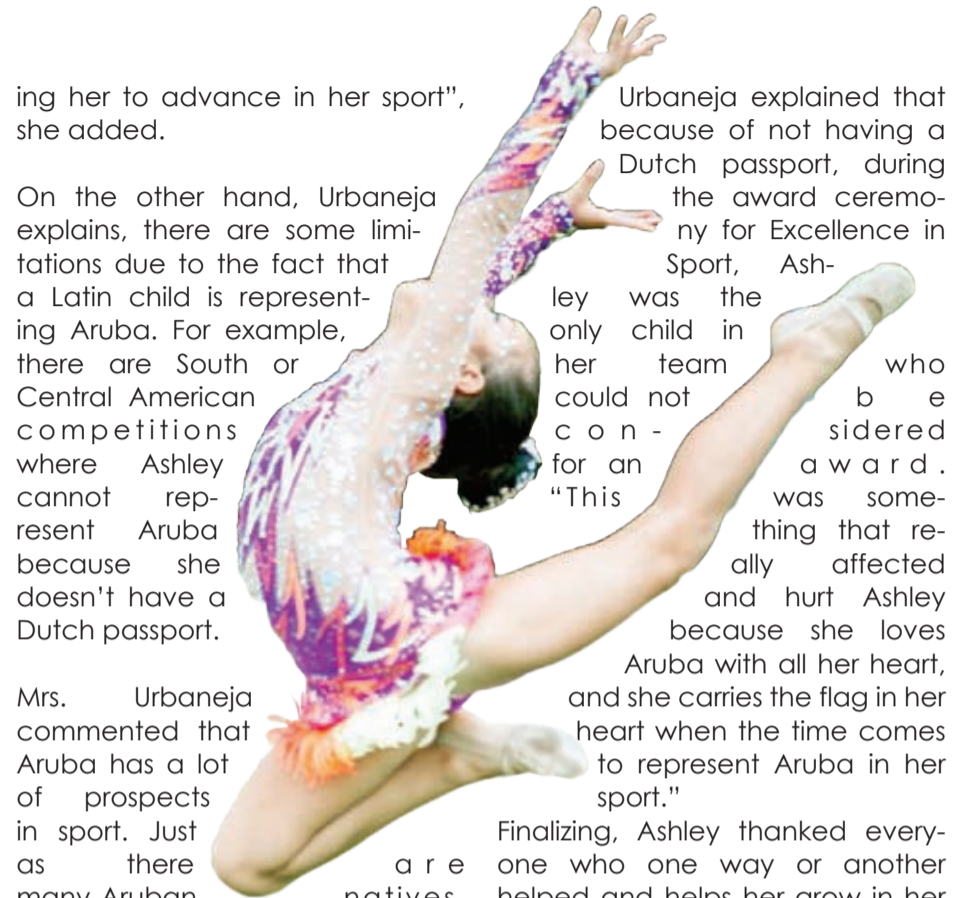
ing her to advance in her sport", she added.

On the other hand, Urbaneja explains, there are some limitations due to the fact that a Latin child is representing Aruba. For example, there are South or Central American competitions where Ashley cannot represent Aruba because she doesn't have a Dutch passport.

Mrs. Urbaneja commented that Aruba has a lot of prospects in sport. Just as there are many Aruban natives, there are also many Latin sportspeople who could represent Aruba and make Aruba's name shine internationally, but regrettably these opportunities are limited. "I hope that in the future there can be an opportunity, and a project together with Ministry of Sport and the Government of Aruba that could give these kids, who love Aruba and love their sport, the opportunity to represent Aruba officially in other international competitions", she added.

Urbaneja explained that because of not having a Dutch passport, during the award ceremony for Excellence in Sport, Ashley was the only child in her team who could not be considered for an award. "This was something that really affected and hurt Ashley because she loves Aruba with all her heart, and she carries the flag in her heart when the time comes to represent Aruba in her sport."

Finalizing, Ashley thanked everyone who one way or another helped and helps her grow in her sport. "Everything I am and where I am today, I thank my parents, my grandma in heaven, my family in Venezuela. They are all important for me, but someone else who is very important in my life is God, nothing would be possible without Him. I want to achieve my dream and represent Aruba in rhythmic gymnastics at the Olympics. I love exchanging experiences with children from other countries because it lets me learn new techniques and demand more of myself to improve." □



CROSSWORD

By THOMAS JOSEPH

ACROSS 38 Crooked

1 Small error 40 Bee-related

6 First letter 42 Historic riveter

11 Flynn of films 43 Rap

12 Low nobleman 44 ATM

13 Stood up button

14 In the middle of 45 Places

15 Plop down

16 Toward the stern 1 Tenants' papers

18 Coffee, in slang 2 Come in

19 Second person 3 Import opponent

20 Once called 4 Sinking signal

21 Mess up 5 Franklin's wife

22 Region 6 Let up

24 Deck toppers

25 Deluge

27 Pack and send

29 High jinks

32 Status —

33 Trickery

34 Middle-earth baddie

35 Ensign's org.

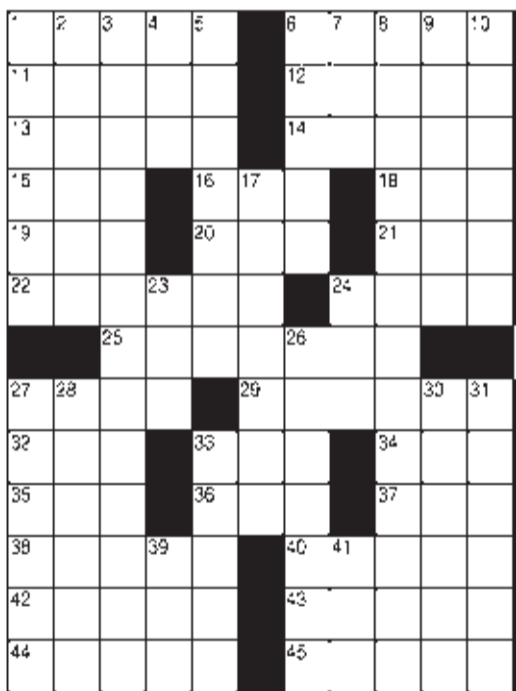
36 Army address

37 "The Matrix" hero



Yesterday's answer

- 7 Hurried flight
- 8 Theater worker
- 9 Writer Balzac
- 10 Ticks off Enzo
- 23 Spinning toy
- 24 Leaf carrier
- 26 Snares
- 27 Cube face
- 28 "The Maltese Falcon" director
- 30 Fold
- 31 Treats with tea
- 33 Fall flower
- 39 Fiction
- 41 Luau dish



A X Y D L B A A X R
is L O N G F E L L O W

One letter stands for another. In this sample, A is used for the three L's, X for the two O's, etc. Single letters, apostrophes, the length and formation of the words are all hints. Each day the code letters are different.

12-2

CRYPTOQUOTE

Z K P E Q N L J V M J H T Z K X N R J O E
M I N E T J O S N K K J E S J K E I I J B .
P I Z V E T J O H Q K Q H X T E J M I N E
T J O S N K S H Q N E Q . — H J T E .
R Q K K Q E E

Yesterday's Cryptoquote: IT IS DECEMBER. AND NOBODY ASKED IF I WAS READY. — SARAH KAY

Is now the right time for your business to buy real estate?

By HILLARY CRAWFORD
of NerdWallet

For small businesses hoping to establish or expand their brick-and-mortar presence, it may seem like a bad time to sink cash into a commercial property purchase.

Amid predictions of an upcoming recession, the Federal Reserve increased the federal funds rate for the sixth time in 2022, citing inflation risks and global conflict. Inevitably, this will make loans more expensive for borrowers.

In reality, though, the perfect time to buy commercial real estate doesn't exist. And when you consider the bigger picture, not all signs point to doomsday.

"There are still really amazing opportunities out there, but I think it really requires small-business owners to think about what their goals and their plans are," says Alyssa Dangler, a commercial real estate attorney and president-elect of Commercial Real Estate Women Network.

Here's what small-business owners should consider when deciding whether to purchase commercial real estate.

COST OF BORROWING

While higher interest rates might not make or break a deal, they could push business owners to cut the size of their down payments or reduce spending elsewhere to accommodate larger monthly payments. Small-business owners waiting for interest rates to fall might be in a holding pattern for longer than they expected, though. According to the Federal Reserve, future fed rate hikes are likely.

However, today's interest



A Store For Rent sign is displayed at a retail property in Chicago, on June 20, 2020.

Associated Press

rates don't seem as astronomical when you look at rates throughout history, Dangler says. For instance, the annual average rate for a 30-year fixed-rate mortgage was 8.39% in 1992 and 16.04% in 1982. This year's average currently stands at 5.08%.

Some entrepreneurs, like Elaina Paige Thomas, owner of Next Paige Talent Management and Production, are choosing to move forward despite rising rates.

"It didn't scare me because I know that we can always refinance down the road," Thomas says. "It's still going toward ownership and equity, so for me, that was always the goal."

POTENTIAL RENOVATIONS

Buying commercial property becomes more complicated if construction loans are involved. Interest rates for this type of financing are typically variable, leaving plenty of opportunity for rates to climb over the duration of the project. To mitigate the risk of a business being unable to afford costlier future payments, Dangler explains, lenders may ask borrowers to purchase an interest rate cap. While this safety

net ensures their rate won't exceed a set limit, it's also an additional cost.

YOUR BUSINESS'S GROWTH STAGE

Typically, more mature businesses have capital and a strong understanding of their growth trajectory.

These factors, plus time in business and more established credit, make for a more appealing loan application and likely a better interest rate.

On the other hand, startup businesses may want to consider leasing before buying right away, suggests Max Grover, president-elect of Commercial Alliance of Realtors West Michigan.

As opposed to more established businesses, he says, some startups might see better returns putting their cash toward inventory, equipment, hiring or marketing.

Additionally, leasing gives them more flexibility to move locations if they grow.

EXPERT ADVICE

Connecting with a commercial real estate agent or broker who specializes in a particular type of property can help buyers weigh their options. "It helps to have your own representation so that your interests are pursued," says Barbi Reuter, CEO, chairman and designated broker of Cushman & Wakefield 'PICOR, a commercial real estate firm. "You want to have the expertise to move at the right time." □

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Atlantic hurricane season ends with 14 named forms

By DAVID FISCHER

Associated Press

MIAMI (AP) — An Atlantic hurricane season that had 14 named storms officially ended on Wednesday, leaving residents in the Florida Keys to celebrate even as others around Florida and Puerto Rico continue to grapple with the damage caused by Hurricanes Ian, Nicole and Fiona. The 2022 season had an unusually calm first half but made up for that with the three destructive hurricanes in the second half, ending with an average number of named storms. The season runs from June 1 until Nov. 30.

This year's period saw eight hurricanes with winds of at least 74 mph (119 kmh), and two of them intensified to major hurricanes with winds reaching at least 111 mph (179 kmh), according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration. An average hurricane season has 14 named storms, seven hurricanes and three major hurricanes, forecasters said. This season was notable for a record-tying inactive August. This year was the first time since 1941 that the Atlantic Ocean has gone from July 3 to the end of August with no named storm, Colorado State University hurricane researcher Phil Klotzbach said. Since 1950, only 1997 and 1961 had no named storms in August.

Several hundred Florida Keys residents gathered Wednesday to mark the season's close by burning hurricane warning flags. The event featured a blast blown on a conch shell, a symbol of the Keys, and speakers recalled those affected by the 2022 hurricanes and expressed gratitude that the Keys were spared major im-



Members of Florida Task Force 2 urban search and rescue gain access to a home through a broken upper window to confirm the home is clear of people and human remains, a week after the passage of Hurricane Ian, in Fort Myers Beach, Fla., on Oct. 5, 2022.

Associated Press

pacts. Members of Key West's ceremonial Conch Republic administration then doused the hurricane flags with rum and set them ablaze. The event was staged beside the U.S. Coast Guard Cutter Ingham, a maritime museum docked at Key West's Truman Waterfront. In late September, Hurricane Ian made landfall as a Category 4 storm in southwest Florida before leaving nearly 150 deaths and a swath of destruction as it moved northeast across the state. After making its way back to the Atlantic,

the storm headed north and struck South Carolina as a Category 1 storm. With 150-mph (241-kmh) maximum sustained winds, Hurricane Ian tied for the fifth-strongest hurricane ever to make landfall in the U.S., officials said. Hurricane Nicole's eye hit central Florida's Treasure Coast area as a Category 1 storm in early November, but the greatest damage seemed to occur more than 100 miles (160 kilometers) to the north around Daytona Beach, where beach erosion started by Hurricane Ian worsened and led to

homes collapsing into the ocean. Hurricane Fiona was the season's first major hurricane, eventually becoming a Category 4 storm with winds of 130 mph (215 kmh) as it rumbled toward Canada. The center of the storm missed the mainland U.S., but it hit Puerto Rico as a Category 1 in mid-September, leaving the entire island without power and at least 25 people dead. □

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Aruba Bank N.V. Acc. #332668
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RBC Royal Bank Acc. #1330772

Assistant Director
Xiomara Arends

Editors
Pilar Flores
Richard Brooks
Angenette Figueroa

Sales
Mark Gomes
Sulaika Croes

Classifieds
classified@cspnv.com

Distribution and Collection
accounting@bondia.com

Social / Website
Juan Luis Pinto

Weststraat 22
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Holiday TV: New musicals, romcoms, specials arrive in flurry

By **ALICIA RANCILIO**
Associated Press

It's December and pretty much every network and streaming service seemingly has a show aimed at spreading holiday cheer. For those looking to skip reruns of Christmases past, there's a bounty of fresh shows and specials targeted to traditionalists, romantics and family friendly entertainment.

For those hungry for more, or just plain hungry, this guide has you covered on some of the notable musicals, romcoms, animated and cooking shows airing and streaming throughout the holiday season.

All times are Eastern Standard Time.

ALREADY AVAILABLE

"Santa Camp," HBO Max. This documentary follows the non-profit New England Santa Society, made up of more than 100 professional Christmas performers, who decide to tackle the lack of diversity among Santa stand-ins at their annual summer camp in New Hampshire. The group enlists a Black Santa, a Santa with a disability, and a transgender Santa to help make playing Santa more inclusive.

"The 12 Days of Christmas Eve," Lifetime. Kelsey Grammer co-stars opposite his daughter, Spencer Grammer, in this fresh take on "A Christmas Carol," as a successful businessman who is so caught up in success, he forgets about what really matters in life, family. When he gets into a car accident on Christmas Eve, he gets 12 tries at redoing the day over to make things right.

"Christmas with You," Netflix. Freddie Prinze Jr. plays a single dad and music teacher named Miguel, whose daughter Cristina is a massive fan of the pop star Angelina (played by Aimee Garcia).

What Cristina doesn't know is that Angelina's career is in jeopardy, and she is in danger of being dropped by her record label if she doesn't release a new hit soon. When Angelina stumbles upon a video Cristina posted online of her singing



This image released by Lifetime shows Kelsey Grammer, left, and his daughter, Spencer Grammer in a scene from "The 12 Days of Christmas Eve."

one of Angelina's songs, she decides to go meet her for an ego boost. Angelina meets Miguel and offers to help him and herself by writing a holiday song with him.

HOLIDAY SOUNDTRACK

"CMA Country Christmas," ABC, Thursday, Dec. 8 at 9 p.m. Country artists including Maren Morris, Old Dominion and Dan + Shay perform holiday classics in this Nashville-filmed special hosted by Carly Pearce.

"O Holy Night: Christmas with The Tabernacle Choir," PBS and BYUtv, Dec. 19., Broadway's Megan Hilty, also known for her role on the TV series "Smash," leads this annual concert with the beloved Tabernacle Choir that was recorded in 2021 to air this year. Actor Neal McDonough narrates.

"Mariah Carey: Merry Christmas To All!" CBS, Tuesday, Dec. 20., Mariah Carey first took the Christmas Queen crown in 1994 with her hit single "All I Want for Christmas is You" that's still in heavy rotation today, and she has no desire to give it back. Her latest seasonal offering is a two-hour holiday concert filmed at New York's Madison Square Garden.

MISTLETOE ENVY

"A Christmas Open House," HGTV, Wednesday, Dec.

7 at 10 p.m., Katie Stevens leads this holiday romance with special guest stars, Ben and Erin Napier, who restore homes on HGTV's "Home Town."

The couple makes their acting debut as artists in Atlanta who help a local home stager (Stevens) and a realtor (Victor Rasuk) prepare a home for selling.

"Candy Coated Christmas," Food Network, Tuesday, Dec. 8 at 10 p.m., Molly McCook stars in this original holiday romance film featuring Food Network star, Ree Drummond.

"The Sound of Christmas," BET and BET Her, Friday, Dec. 9 at 9 p.m., Ne-Yo, Serayah, and Draya Michele star in this film about a music teacher who meets a wealthy widower with a money-hungry, status-obsessed girlfriend and sparks fly. "A Christmas Fumble," OWN, Saturday, Dec. 10 at 9 p.m., Eva Marcille stars as a crisis manager who takes on a new client hoping to dodge a scandal (played by Devale Ellis.) The only problem: The two used to date making for a complicated assignment.

"The Holiday Sitter," Hallmark Channel, Sunday, Dec. 11 at 8 p.m., Jonathan Bennett ("Mean Girls," "The Christmas House") is a busy businessman named Sam

who is laser-focused on work, until he gets tapped to babysit his niece and nephew while their parents are away. Sam's not the best at uncle-duty and isn't thrilled to meet Jason (George Krissa,) a family friend who seems to have the surrogate uncle job down pat. Each thaw to one another as the days go by in this LGBTQ love story. "Must Love Christmas," CBS, Sunday, Dec. 11 at 9 p.m., "The Equalizer" star, Liza Lapira, plays a popular romance novelist that specializes in Christmas-set love stories who finds herself stranded in a small, picturesque town... and in a love triangle.

"A Christmas to Treasure," Lifetime, Friday, Dec. 16 at 8 p.m., Real-life married couple Kyle Massey and Taylor Frey star as estranged best friends who reunite for a holiday treasure hunt in their hometown and the two begin to see each other as more-than-friends.

HEARTWARMING FOR THE HOLIDAYS

"The 24th Annual A Home for the Holidays at the Grove," CBS, Paramount+, Friday, Dec. 23 at 8 p.m., This yearly special mixes musical performances with docu-style stories about adoption and foster care, as more than 400,000 chil-

dren in the U.S. dream of finding a forever home and family.

Gloria Estefan hosts and Andy Grammer, Little Big Town, David Foster and Katharine McPhee, and Mickey Guyton will perform.

FAMILY FARE

"Snow Day," Nickelodeon/Paramount+, Friday, Dec. 16 at 7 p.m., is a musical remake of the 2000 comedy film featuring Chris Elliott, Jean Smart and Chevy Chase about hijinks that occur when a record level of snow falls in Upstate New York.

"5 More Sleeps 'Til Christmas," NBC, Friday, Dec. 23 at 8:30 p.m., This half-hour animated special is inspired by Jimmy Fallon's bestselling book of the same name and also narrated by "The Tonight Show" host. It's about a boy whose specific plans leading up to Christmas get interrupted by surprise guests, helping him to embrace the true meaning of the holiday.

HOLIDAY EATING

"The Great American Baking Show Celebrity Holiday," The Roku Channel, Dec. 2., Ellie Kemper and Zach Cherry host a holiday baking competition with celebrities including Oscar-winner Nat Faxon, "Saturday Night Live" cast member Chloe Fineman and former NFL player Marshawn Lynch compete in bake-offs before famous baker judges, Paul Hollywood and Prue Leith.

"Mary Berry's Ultimate Christmas," PBS, Dec. 19 at 9 p.m., Beloved British home cook Dame Mary Berry takes viewers inside her approach to hosting a holiday feast attended by special guests. □

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Secure with 5-year deal, Clark pushes to make MLBPA stronger

By DAVID BRANDT

AP Sports Writer

SCOTTSDALE, Ariz. (AP) —

Tony Clark has never had more clout as executive director of the Major League Baseball Players Association.

The 50-year-old helped the union navigate a tumultuous stretch that included a pandemic-shortened 2020 season and a new labor deal in March that not only saved a full 162-game season but also was viewed as at least a modest win for the players and their pocketbooks.

Now, there's a relative calm during a baseball off-season that hasn't been seen for a few years.

Baseball fans are probably enjoying that normalcy, but for Clark, there's not much time to celebrate.

"The preparation for the next agreement never stops," he said.

Clark was in Arizona on Wednesday afternoon, shuttling between appointments at the MLBPA's winter meetings.

Two days before, the union voted to extend Clark's contract five more years through 2027, putting him in position to lead players through the entirety of their current labor agreement with owners that expires in December 2026.

"I'm grateful for the opportunity," Clark said. "Suffice it to say, I'm humbled to be in a position to advocate

for the guys."

Now that the big league financials are settled for the next few seasons, Clark's attention can turn to more than 5,000 new union members.

The sport's minor league players elected to join the MLBPA in September, paving the way for potentially better pay and playing conditions for those at the lower levels of professional baseball.

Clark who had a 15-year MLB career said conditions haven't improved much for those minor leaguers since he was working his way up to the big leagues in the early 1990s. He said the MLB portion of the union has been supportive because the vast majority of those players have spent time in the minors.

There are numerous issues to address.

"When you get beyond that, there are a number of things: housing, food, training."

Players with major league contracts average more than \$4 million per year and have a \$700,000 minimum salary while in the big leagues, but salaries for most minor league players are far lower.

MLB raised weekly minimum salaries for minor leaguers in 2021 to \$400 at rookie and short-season levels, \$500 at Class A, \$600 at Double-A and \$700 at Triple-A.



Major League Baseball Players Association Executive Director Tony Clark answers a question during a news conference in New York on March 11, 2022.

Associated Press

Some have argued that those low salaries have made it hard for professional baseball to attract top athletes. Top collegiate programs in the SEC, ACC, Pac-12, Big 12 and other conferences often have better facilities and travel arrangements than their minor league counterparts. The NCAA's new eligibility rules allowing players to make money on NIL deals have also made college sports a more lucrative enterprise.

"We hope that any number of improvements that we're able to make here, will make it a little more enticing than it might have otherwise been," Clark said. "As much as it may have been romantic to ride on the buses, and the experiences you get in the minor leagues, going back

to 'Bull Durham,' the opportunity both at the collegiate level and in other sports are a little different." Regarding the recently negotiated big league deal, Clark said the next step is to find out what's working and what isn't.

It brought major changes that included expansion of the DH to the National League, increasing the postseason from 10 teams to 12, advertisements on uniforms, a balanced schedule that reduces intra-division play starting in 2023 and measures aimed to incentivize competition and decrease strip-down rebuilding, such as an amateur draft lottery. Major League Baseball's 30 teams have appeared to navigate the turbulent COVID-19 era with the sport's financial resources

FIFA WORLD CUP Qatar 2022			
Group E			
JAP	2 - 1	ESP	dec 1
CRC	2 - 4	GER	dec 1
Group F			
CRO	0 - 0	BEL	dec 1
CAN	1 - 2	MAR	dec 1
Group G			
SER	- - -	SUI	dec 2
CAM	- - -	BRA	dec 2
Group H			
KOR	- - -	POR	dec 2
GHA	- - -	URU	dec 2

intact. One example: MLB recently sold its remaining share of a streaming service technology company called BAMTech to the Walt Disney Co. for \$900 million.

"I'll say this — the industry is doing well," Clark said. "And the industry, I believe, is better when all 30 teams are competing to be the last team standing. We believe that the system is designed to provide that support." □

NFL launches challenge to predict, prevent player injuries

NEW YORK (AP) — The NFL is searching for a technology-driven game plan to help predict and prevent player injuries on the field. The league announced Thursday it is partnering with Amazon Web Service on the NFL Contact Detection Challenge, a contest in which designers will use machine learning and computer vision to find new ways to measure and analyze the timing, duration and frequency of player contact during NFL games. The NFL said in a release the data collected would

improve the league's ability to better anticipate injuries and help prevent them and potentially lead to tweaks to rules based on the information gathered. "Quantifying the risk of injury that players face in every possible in-game scenario is a crucial step in understanding how we can reduce that risk, and ultimately prevent injuries" said Jennifer Langton, the NFL's Senior Vice President of Health and Safety Innovation.

"By engaging entrants with a wide range of expertise,

this challenge will help us understand which game situations have elevated amounts of contact. This can inform rules changes to improve the game." The challenge, announced at the "AWS re:Invent" conference in Las Vegas, will begin Dec. 5 with entries submitted on a website hosted by Kaggle, a leading platform for data science competitions. The top finishers will be announced in March, with the first-place entry receiving \$50,000. □



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James, left, passes the ball as Portland Trail Blazers forward Justise Winslow defends during the first half of an NBA basketball game Wednesday, Nov. 30, 2022, in Los Angeles.

Associated Press

College Football Playoff expands to 12 teams in 2024 season

By **RALPH D. RUSSO**

AP College Football Writer

The College Football Playoff announced Thursday it will expand to a 12-team event starting in 2024, completing an 18-month process that was fraught with delays and disagreements. The announcement came a day after the Rose Bowl agreed to amend its contract for the 2024 and 2025 seasons, which was the last hurdle CFP officials needed cleared to triple the size of what is now a four-team format. "I never gave up," CFP Executive Director Bill Hancock said.

The first round of the playoff in 2024 will take place on campus sites matching teams seeded 5-12 the week ending Saturday, Dec. 21. Exact dates are still to be determined.

The quarterfinals and semifinals will be played in the bowls that have been rotating as hosts of the semifinals in the current format: Rose, Sugar, Orange, Peach, Cotton and Fiesta. "I want to re-emphasize that all the bowls stepped up, all six," Hancock said. "And there's no secret that we were down to the



The College Football Playoff logo is shown on the field at AT&T Stadium before the Rose Bowl NCAA college football game between Notre Dame and Alabama in Arlington, Texas, Jan. 1, 2021.

Associated Press

final minutes of the fourth quarter. And there was no overtime. And if we hadn't reached an agreement, there's no question in my mind that we would have continued the four-team playoff through the '2024 and '25 seasons. But we're here to celebrate the fact that we did reach an agreement."

The championship game for the 2024 season will be played Jan. 20, 2025, in Atlanta. The title game the

next year will be played Jan. 19, 2026, in Miami Gardens, Florida. Both are more than a week later than the current title game timing. Expansion is expected to produce about \$450 million in additional gross revenue for the conferences and schools that participate. The College Football Playoff's 12-year contract with ESPN runs through the 2025-26 season.

The plan to expand the playoff was unveiled in

June 2021, but conference commissioners who manage the CFP could not come to the unanimous consensus needed to push the proposal forward. Expansion for the 2024 season was pronounced dead back in February.

University presidents and chancellors who oversee the CFP stepped in and revived the process over the summer. They approved the original plan for use by 2026, and threw it back to

the commissioners, directing them to try to expand by 2024, if possible.

No longer haggling over the format, the commissioners needed to work through when and where the games would be played and whether bowl partners and championship game hosts cities could accommodate a change in schedule for 2024 and 2025.

The Rose Bowl issue was the last to be settled, as organizers for the 120-year-old bowl game were hoping to get some assurances from the CFP that they would keep their valuable New Year's Day time when new contracts go into effect in 2026.

CFP officials balked. Facing the possibility of being painted as an obstructionist and potentially being shut out of the expanded playoff in the long term, the Rose Bowl agreed to move forward in good faith.

"It's our intent to keep the Rose Bowl game on Jan. 1," said Laura Farber, chairwoman of the Rose Bowl Management Committee. "But we'll remain flexible in scheduling as needed." □

LeBron: Media disparity between Jones photo, Irving comments

LOS ANGELES (AP) — LeBron James has questions about the disparity of media scrutiny he believes is being applied to a 1957 photo of Jerry Jones and the recent controversy sur-

rounding Kyrie Irving. The photo of Jones, captured by an Associated Press photographer, shows him standing among a group of white students at North Little Rock High

School in Arkansas on Sept. 9, 1957. The group was blocking six Black students who were attempting to desegregate the school and news reports said that moments after the image was taken, the students were shoved down a flight of stairs. The photo accompanied a Washington Post story last month that was about Jones' legacy as owner of the Dallas Cowboys, including how the team has never had a Black head coach.

James has spoken often about the Cowboys he was a fan of the team for years before saying in October on Instagram Live that he has switched allegiances but said Wednesday that he found it interesting that he wasn't asked about the Jones

photo. "When I watched Kyrie talk, and he says, 'I know who I am, but I want to keep the same energy when we're talking about my people and the things they've been through,' and that Jerry Jones photo is one of those moments that our people, Black people, have been through in America," James said after the Los Angeles Lakers' game on Wednesday night. "And I feel like as a Black man, as a Black athlete, someone with power and with a platform, when we do something wrong or something that people don't agree with, it's on every single tabloid, every single news coverage. It's on the bottom ticker. It's asked about every single day.

"But it seems like to me

that the whole Jerry Jones situation, the photo, and I know it was years and years ago, and we all make mistakes, I get it. It seems like it's just been buried under, like, 'Oh, it happened. OK. We just move on.' And I was just kind of disappointed that I haven't received that question from you guys."

Irving was suspended for an eventual eight games by the Brooklyn Nets earlier this season after the guard a former teammate of James' with the Cleveland Cavaliers tweeted a link to a film containing antisemitic material.

James was asked by reporters about that last month, and he made clear that he thought Irving made a significant mistake. □



Los Angeles Lakers forward LeBron James, left, passes the ball as Portland Trail Blazers forward Justise Winslow defends during the first half of an NBA basketball game Wednesday, Nov. 30, 2022, in Los Angeles.

Associated Press